

WOMENA RECOMMENDATIONS

Many people believe that

- girls are born with a hymen in the form of a solid membrane covering the vaginal opening.
- the hymen can be identified through physical or visual examination.
- the hymen is always broken at first vaginal sexual intercourse, causing bleeding.
- therefore, a lack of blood on the wedding night proves the bride is not a virgin.

However, there is increasing evidence and awareness that none of these beliefs are correct.

Usually there is no solid membrane covering the vagina. Instead, there is folded mucosal tissue inside the vagina. Some now call it a 'hymenal ring/rim' or 'vaginal corona'.

The appearance of the hymen/corona varies among individuals, and may change over time. Hormones make the corona more elastic in puberty. Daily activities (such as cycling, sports, inserting tampons or menstrual cups) may affect appearance.

It is impossible to test whether a girl or woman is a virgin by inspecting her corona, either visually, or by inserting two fingers into the vagina (the 'two-finger test'). The UN strongly recommends against these "virginity tests" as they are inaccurate, and harmful.

Bleeding at first vaginal intercourse does not always happen. There are only few studies, but estimates range from around 30% to around 70%.

Virginity before marriage is an important value in many religions and cultures. The definition of 'virginity' varies between communities and among religious leaders. Many agree that virginity is defined by first vaginal intercourse, not by bleeding.

WoMena believes in providing best available evidence, so that women and girls, and their communities, can make informed choice. Using menstrual cups does not affect virginity, and there is as yet no evidence that menstrual cups affect the corona. However, out of respect for cultural beliefs, WoMena recommends that, if girls or women have continuing concerns, they should choose an alternative product for the time being.